

ZAMBIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. A 1996 amendment to the Constitution declared Christianity to be the official religion of the country while upholding the right of every person to enjoy that person's freedom of conscience or religion.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 290,586 square miles and a population of 11.5 million. According to a 2000 census, approximately 87 percent of the population is Christian, 1 percent is Muslim or Hindu, and 7 percent adheres to other belief systems, including indigenous religions. Five percent did not report their religion.

The majority of indigenous persons are either Roman Catholic or Protestant; however, many Christians hold some traditional beliefs as well. There has been an upsurge of new Pentecostal churches that have attracted many young adherents.

Muslims are primarily concentrated in areas along the railroad line from Lusaka to Livingstone, in Chipata, and in other parts of Eastern Province. Many citizens of South Asian descent are Muslim, although Hindus constitute a sizable percentage of this group as well. A small minority of indigenous persons is also Muslim.

Foreign missionary groups are present in the country.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. Article 19 of the Constitution provides for freedom of thought and religion to all citizens, freedom to change religion or belief, and freedom to manifest and propagate religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice, and observance. Other statutes provide effective remedies for the violation of religious freedom. These provisions are enforced in a rigorous and nondiscriminatory fashion.

The Oasis Forum--composed of the Law Association of Zambia, the Nongovernmental Organization (NGO) Coordinating Committee, the Zambia Episcopal Conference, the Christian Council of Zambia, and the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia--continued to be active during the period covered by this report. In April 2007 the Oasis Forum declared a "constitutional struggle," adopting a roadmap that calls for the Government to empower a constituent assembly to adopt a new constitution by the end of 2008. The Government criticized the Oasis Forum over its stance on the constitutional review process and the mode of adoption of a new constitution. Church leaders continued to freely and vocally criticize the Government, organize activities, and mobilize public opinion.

Religious instruction is provided for Christians in public schools but not for Muslims.

The following holy days are considered national holidays: Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas.

There are governmental controls that require the registration of religious groups. During the period covered by this report, there were no reports that the Government refused to register any religious groups, although there were reports that the Government began to enforce registration requirements more strictly. The burdensome registration requirements forced at least one church group to suspend operations pending its ability to comply. To be eligible for registration groups must have a unique name; possess a constitution consistent with the country's laws; and display compatibility with the peace, welfare, and good order of the country. Unregistered religious groups are not allowed to operate. Violators can face a fine and imprisonment for up to 7 years.

In March 2006 then-Foreign Minister Ronnie Shikapwasha stated publicly that the Government would begin the practice of consulting with the Council of Churches

before it registers new church groups. The new policy was not tested in practice, because there were no attempts to register a new church with the Government since the announcement. The Universal Church of God continued to press for a court order finding government officials in contempt following the February 2006 deportation of two of its ministers. The Church argued that the deportation of the ministers violated a High Court order that nullified a government decision to deregister the Church in 2006 and stayed proceedings against the Church pending the outcome of the Government's appeal to the Supreme Court. The High Court did not rule on the Church's contempt petition during the reporting period. The Church continued to operate in the country.

There were no reports that foreign missionary groups faced any special requirements or restrictions beyond those imposed on other foreigners.

The Government requires religious instruction in public schools. Such instruction is conducted in both the Catholic and Protestant traditions and is mandatory for all students through grade seven. Islamic or other forms of religious education are not available in public schools; however, they are available in private schools owned and controlled by those religious groups. Parents can also homeschool their children.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

Leaders of various ecumenical movements, such as the Zambia Episcopal Conference, the Christian Council of Zambia, and the Evangelical Fellowship of

Zambia, held regular meetings to promote mutual understanding and interfaith dialogue and to discuss national concerns.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Embassy officials met with a wide spectrum of religious representatives to promote interreligious dialogue and collaboration on several areas of concern. The Embassy funded a Muslim women's group that conducted workshops to emphasize the importance of religious tolerance and the need to respect human rights. The Embassy also donated books to the religion department and library at the University of Zambia, and the library of the Zambia Open University.